

## **PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS REPORT DISTRICT OF NORTH DAKOTA**

**February 15, 2003**

This report is submitted pursuant to the directive by the EOUSA to provide by February 15, 2003, the third status report on the implementation of Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) in the District.

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The Safe Neighborhoods project is in the inceptive stage in the District of North Dakota. The United States Attorney has made PSN a priority in the District. On May 20, 2002, the United States Attorney designated an AUSA as firearms prosecutor and PSN coordinator.

This report is intended to set forth how the office has implemented PSN and how it will continue to assess the nature and extent of the gun violence problem in the District of North Dakota. Further, the report illustrates how the District of North Dakota, through PSN, will address the problem.

### **Partnerships**

Since its initial report, the District has developed formal partnerships with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in forming a PSN Task Force. As noted in the initial report, historically this office has worked closely with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), other federal agencies, tribal law enforcement, state law enforcement, and local prosecutors to encourage referrals of appropriate cases for prosecution under the federal firearm statutes. Through the implementation of Project Safe Neighborhoods in the District, these partnerships have been strengthened with the development of the PSN Task Force and the grant selection process. Additionally, ATF and the PSN coordinator have engaged in a concerted effort to attend weekly state and local drug task force meetings to encourage the referral of firearms cases to the United States, where appropriate.

The increased profile of the PSN project in the District has improved the communication between state and Federal prosecutors. The screening process for the adoption of firearms cases into Federal court is informal yet seems to be an effective means of ensuring Federal prosecution of certain cases. It is the goal of the District to put together a formal screening mechanism for this process. The

PSN Task Force has identified as one of its goals of the 2003 grant process to fund a project to create a central database to efficiently track and process firearms cases as they proceed from arrest to prosecution. This will provide important information to state and Federal prosecutors to implement a formal screening process.

## **Strategic Planning and Accountability**

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### **A. Nature of gun violence in the District**

The nature of gun violence in the District of North Dakota remains essentially the same as articulated in the January 31, 2002, report.

### **B. Firearm Violence Data**

Data recently taken from the publication entitled Criminal Justice Statistics Special Report, Homicide in North Dakota, 2001, published by the North Dakota Attorney General's Office, indicates that nine murders were committed in North Dakota during 2001; four of those were committed with a firearm. One of the nine homicides in 2001 resulted from a domestic violence incident. During the same period 71 robberies were reported, 26.8 percent having been committed with a firearm. There were 275 aggravated assaults, a decrease of 13.8 percent from the 319 aggravated assaults reported in 2000. Eleven of the 275 aggravated assaults involved a firearm. Although not reported in the Attorney General's Criminal Justice Statistics Special Report yet, since January 2002 there have been six homicides committed in North Dakota, two of which involved a firearm. Of the six, four were domestic related. Thus, the homicide rate for the state is very low. Recent informal communication with federal, state, and local law enforcement indicates that there has been no substantial change since 2000. These agencies generally reported that they noticed no increase in felonious assaults or homicides involving the use of firearms.

Prosecution of firearms violations in the District has focused on those criminals using firearms in the commission of violent crimes and drug offenses, as well as individuals possessing firearms after being convicted of felony offenses, primarily those with lengthy records. According to United States Attorney's Office statistics, the District indicted 55 gun cases for prosecution in calendar year

2002. This is an increase of 104% over the total number of firearms violations indicted in calendar year 2001. Furthermore, at least twelve cases include violations of Title 18, United States Code, Section 924(c).

C. Strategy development and impact assessment

The District of North Dakota, through a selection committee, has selected Minot State University for the local research/crime analyst grant. As part of its proposal, Minot State University will gather data from a variety of sources and compile it on a quarterly basis for the PSN Task Force. Based upon these findings, the PSN Task Force can assess where future efforts are to be focused.

Minot State University was also chosen by the selection committee for the community outreach grant. Through ideas developed by the PSN Task Force and research from the research/crime analyst grant the District will aggressively promote PSN and the goals of the PSN Task force.

The North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation has been chosen as the fiscal agent for the 2003 PSN grant process. The PSN Task force and selection committee will meet after the PSN National Conference to review ideas brought back from the conference and incorporate them into the Task Force's strategy.

The PSN Task Force recently met and identified three areas on which to focus on with the 2003 grant:

1. Domestic abuse cases involving firearms.

The District of North Dakota has a high percentage of domestic-abuse related homicides. A goal of the PSN prosecutor continues to be working closely with domestic abuse investigators and prosecutors to identify cases where the perpetrator possesses a firearm after a domestic violence conviction or uses a firearm while committing domestic abuse.

2. Firearms Prosecution Database

As noted above, this database will be used to efficiently track firearms cases from arrest through

disposition to assist in creating an effective screening process for the prosecution of firearms cases in the District.

### 3. Community Outreach to Schools

Part of the new grant will be used to implement education and community outreach through the school systems in the District. We hope to use the already existing networks in the District with DARE and GREAT programs to facilitate this goal.

As noted in the initial report, North Dakota has the least gun violence of any state in the country. It is our intention to try to keep gun violence at a minimum and try to lower the numbers that currently exist. The formal development of the PSN Task Force, working in partnership with Minot State University, will assist in achieving this goal.

As a full assessment of the gun violence problem in the District is completed, the office intends to strengthen partnerships with local prosecutors and law enforcement to formulate strategies to address the defined problem. Once a data base is established, the office will be able to identify methods to measure the impact of the strategies developed.

### **Outreach**

To communicate the District's local gun initiative to the public, the United States Attorney for the District of North Dakota announced the formulation of the PSN Task Force in conjunction with the announcement of the research and community outreach grants. This will be conducted through press conferences to be held shortly after the National PSN Conference in 2003.

It is anticipated that as the PSN Task Force continues to work together with the grantees, new strategies will be developed that will focus on a few specific communities in the state and that outreach will be focused on those communities. This will include outreach to Native American communities on the District's Indian reservations. As noted above, outreach to the District's schools is a priority of the Task Force.

## **Training**

As part of the PSN initiative the PSN prosecutor has contacted and will provide training to the following agencies in 2003:

- 1) Fargo Police Department
- 2) Bismarck Police Department
- 3) West Fargo Police Department

As noted above, this training will supplement the training and education component of the community outreach to schools in the District.